



Week 31 — Performance Consolidation

Tags: `opposition-specific` `compactness` `progression` `full-squad-practice`

Weekly Overview

FIELD	DETAIL
Week number	31 of 36
Season phase	6 — Performance Consolidation
Core principle	Compactness (Tuesday)
Secondary principle	Progression: through, around, over (Thursday)
Previous match review focus	Apply the three routes below to the most recent fixture.
Weekly tactical problem	Phase 6's opposition-specific work begins. Rather than a single generic idea, this week teaches the team two genuinely different tactical pictures — a direct, physical opponent on Tuesday, and a patient, possession-based opponent on Thursday — and asks the team to recognise which picture it's actually facing and respond with the correct plan, built entirely on principles the team already owns.
Formation-neutral explanation	Opposition-specific preparation is not about memorising a rigid game plan for one team — it's about recognising which of a small number of recurring pictures an opponent presents (direct and physical, patient and possession-based, fast and counter-attacking, and so on) and knowing which of the team's own principles matter most against each one.
Example structural applications	A 4-3-3 team facing a direct, physical opponent leans hardest on defensive compactness and duel-winning through its back four and double pivot; the same team facing a patient possession side leans hardest on pressing triggers and fast progression through its front three once the ball is won. A 3-4-3 team applies the identical logic through its back three and wing-backs, and its front three — the picture read is the same; the bodies delivering it differ.

Match Review and Weekly Adjustment

Route A — Previous performance was strong. If the team played well, use this week to sharpen the specific tactical reads that already worked — a good performance is the best evidence of which of these two pictures the team is already reading well, and which still needs work.

Route B — Previous performance exposed a tactical weakness. If the team struggled against a particular style of opponent recently, use whichever half of this week (Tuesday's direct/physical picture or Thursday's patient/possession picture) matches that struggle as the week's main focus, and treat the other half as useful but secondary.

Route C — Attendance, facilities or player availability are disrupted. Both days scale to reduced numbers — the underlying picture-recognition principle matters more than rehearsing every practice at full numbers every week.

Tuesday — Session 61

FIELD	DETAIL
Session number	61 of 72
Week	31
Season phase	6 — Performance Consolidation
Training day	Tuesday
Session theme	Opposition-specific: direct, physical opponent
Short summary	Prepares the team specifically for a direct, physical, duel-heavy opponent who plays long and contests second balls — staying vertically compact, winning individual and collective duels, and controlling the picture that follows a long ball rather than being overrun by it.
Tags	`opposition-specific` `compactness` `duels`
Primary learning objective	The team stays compact and wins the majority of individual and second-ball duels against a direct, physical playing style.
Secondary learning objective	The team recognises a direct, physical picture quickly and adjusts its shape and mentality accordingly, without needing to be told.
Match connection	This week's named match-day connection: two clearly different tactical plans delivered.
Expected tactical outcome	A team that stays compact under direct pressure and wins more duels and second balls than it loses.
Expected physical load	Duel intensity, moderate — higher-contact, shorter, sharper actions rather than sustained running volume.
Recommended intensity	7–8 / 10.
Equipment list	20 footballs · 20 flat markers · 12 cones (orange) · 2 sets of bibs (2 colours, 10 each) · 2 full-size or portable goals
Player numbers	Designed for 16 outfield + 2 goalkeepers; scales 10–22, see contingencies.
Goalkeeper requirements	Both goalkeepers train throughout; distribution and organisation under direct pressure is coached explicitly.
Pitch dimensions	Largest area this week is 50 x 36 m (Practice 4).
Area layout	A moderate technical zone for Practice 2, a tight duel-focused area for Practice 3, full size for Practice 4.
Contingency — lower attendance (10–13)	Practice 2 reduces to 6v4; Practice 3 becomes 5v5; Practice 4 becomes 6v6.
Contingency — higher attendance (20+)	Practice 4 can extend to 9v9.
Contingency — restricted space	All three practices scale proportionally; the duel-and-compactness principle survives at any scale.

TIMELINE (60 MINUTES)

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
0:00–0:10	10 min	Arrival & warm-up — <i>Meet the Duel</i>	Light green

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
0:10-0:25	15 min	Technical practice — <i>Stay Compact, Win the Second Ball</i>	Club green
0:25-0:27	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:27-0:42	15 min	Skill game — <i>Duels Decide It</i>	Dark green
0:42-0:44	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:44-1:00	16 min	Conditioned match — <i>Face the Long Ball</i>	Black
1:00-1:01	1 min	Reflection	—

(This week's timeline runs to 61 minutes to allow the conditioned match slightly longer, given the higher duel and physical demand — trim from the arrival phase if the session must finish exactly on the hour.)

PRACTICE 1 — MEET THE DUEL (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 10 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate

Tactical purpose: Prepares the body and mind for a duel-heavy session, and gives the coach an early read on the group's current appetite for physical contact and aerial contests.

Organisation: 16 x 12 m grids, pairs. No goalkeeper requirement — both keepers join fully, including aerial work.

Walkthrough: Paired warm-up progressing from simple shielding and jockeying into controlled 1v1 duels for a thrown or dropped ball, both feet and head, with the coach managing intensity carefully as players are still warming up.

Rules: Fully controlled contact only; no reckless duels this early in the session.

Coaching points:

- *Technical:* body position and timing in a duel, not just effort.
- *Physical:* controlled, progressive intensity building toward full contest.

PRACTICE 2 — STAY COMPACT, WIN THE SECOND BALL (TECHNICAL PRACTICE)

Duration: 15 minutes · **Training load:** High

Tactical purpose: Trains the team to stay vertically compact against a long, direct ball, and to win the second ball immediately after an aerial or physical duel, rather than being split open by the first contact.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 44 x 28 m
- **Players:** 8 defending players vs 5 direct-playing opponents
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through, organising the block from behind and dealing with any ball played over the top

- **Team sizes:** 8 v 5
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** flat markers for starting positions
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** 2 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart:** coach restarts on any stoppage, frequently feeding long balls in
- **Coach position:** mobile, close enough to judge duel timing
- **Rotation method:** groups rotate every five minutes
- **Direction of play:** the defending team works to stay compact and win the second ball

Practice walkthrough: The coach or the attacking group repeatedly plays long, direct balls into the defending block. The defending eight must hold tight vertical distances between their lines, win the first contact where possible, and — crucially — win the second ball immediately afterward rather than allowing it to bounce loose into space behind the block.

Rules: A won second ball inside the block's own shape counts as a successful repetition; a second ball won by the direct-playing team inside the block's shape counts against the defending group.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* whichever player contests the first ball must immediately have a team-mate arriving to contest the second.
- *Unit:* the whole defending line holds its distances rather than being stretched by the first ball played in behind or over the top.
- *Team:* not applicable at this scale.
- *Transition:* winning the second ball is itself the start of the team's own possession — this connects directly to Thursday's theme.

Decision-making triggers:

- Ball played long → the nearest defender wins or contests the first ball, a team-mate immediately arrives for the second.
- Second ball loose → whoever arrives first commits fully and decisively.
- Block stretched by the long ball → recover distances immediately, don't chase the ball individually.

Communication language used: "second ball," "tight," "step," "cover."

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Heading and duel technique, first-touch control of a won second ball.
Tactical	Vertical compactness maintained under direct, long-ball pressure.
Physical	Repeated short, sharp duel-based effort.
Psychological	Competitive appetite for the physical contest, without losing shape discipline.
Communication & leadership	Calling "second ball" early enough for a team-mate to arrive in support.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What happens to our shape if we all chase the first ball individually?
2. Who is responsible for the second ball, and how do we make sure someone always is?
3. How is staying compact here different from staying compact against a possession-based opponent?
4. What would this look like if the long ball went in behind our back line instead of into our block?

Progressions:

1. Add a genuine "in behind" long ball option for the attacking group.
2. Reduce the practice area, increasing duel frequency.
3. Add a scoring consequence for a clean second-ball win that leads directly to a counter-attack.

Regressions:

1. Reduce the frequency of long balls, allowing the block to reset between repetitions.
2. Widen the practice area for more recovery time.
3. Reduce the attacking group to three players.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The block splits open, with defenders scattered after the first ball	Individual duel-chasing rather than a coordinated block response	Gaps appearing between defensive lines after the long ball is played	Stop	Freeze the picture, show the correct compact response	Resume
The second ball is consistently lost	No one arrives in support of the first defender quickly enough	The first ball is won cleanly but the loose second ball goes to the opponent	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "who should have been arriving there?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: a mix of *freeze-and-show* for the compactness principle and *questioning* for the second-ball responsibility.

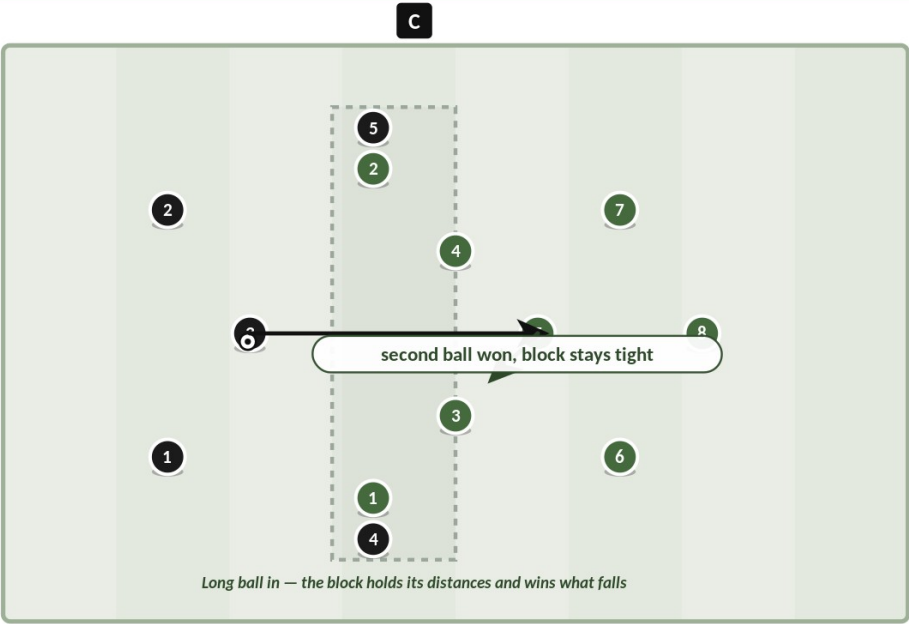
Success indicators:

- The block's vertical distances stay consistent even under repeated long balls.
- Second balls are won by the defending team more often than not by the end of the practice.
- Players arrive in visible, early support of whoever contests the first ball.

Coach's eye: watch the shape immediately after the first contact, not the duel itself — a team that wins the duel but loses its shape has only won half the picture.

T31.2 STAY COMPACT, WIN THE SECOND BALL — Technical Practice

44 x 28 m • 8v5 • defending long, direct balls and duels while staying vertically compact • 15 minutes



● Defending team ● Direct-playing opponent ● Ball ➔ Compact recovery / second-ball win
■ Compact block line

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AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram): "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style. A 44x28 metre area with dimension labels and a dashed compact block reference line. Eight players in dark green bibs numbered 1–8 organised in a compact vertical block, and five players in black bibs numbered 1–5 spread wider. White football near a black player. A black solid arrow showing a long pass into the block, and a curved dashed line showing a player arriving to win the second ball. Title: 'STAY COMPACT, WIN THE SECOND BALL — Technical Practice'. Subtitle: '44 x 28 m • 8v5 • defending long, direct balls and duels while staying vertically compact • 15 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

Realistic illustration — description: Elevated wide view of a training area, a compact green-bibbed defensive block contesting a long ball in the air, a second green-bibbed player arriving quickly to win the loose second ball, coach close by timing the duels carefully.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated wide three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football training. A compact group of players in dark green bibs contesting a long ball in the air, with a team-mate in a matching bib arriving quickly to win the second ball on the ground. A coach standing close by, closely observing the duels. Overcast evening light, realistic grass texture, amateur adult players of varied build showing physical effort. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

PRACTICE 3 — DUELS DECIDE IT (SKILL GAME)

Duration: 15 minutes · **Training load:** High

Tactical purpose: Rewards winning individual 1v1 and aerial duels directly, sharpening the competitive appetite and technique needed against a physical opponent inside a genuinely competitive, enjoyable game format.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 30 x 20 m
- **Players:** 12 outfield, rotating
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through
- **Team sizes:** 6 v 6
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** flat markers
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** 3 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart location:** nearest sideline
- **Coach position:** sideline, central, close enough to judge duels fairly
- **Rotation method:** none required at this scale
- **Direction of play:** both directions, small goals or end-zones

Practice walkthrough: A 6v6 game in which every clearly won 1v1 or aerial duel is worth a point in addition to goals, directly rewarding the physical, competitive qualities the week is built around, while still requiring genuine football quality to create and finish chances.

Rules: Coach awards a point for each clearly won duel, judged fairly and consistently; goals are worth three points.

Tactical roles: individual duel-winning combined with the team-shape habits rehearsed in Practice 2.

Decision-making triggers:

- A duel is available and winnable → commit fully and fairly.
- A duel is not favourable → delay, show the opponent away from danger, and wait for support.

Communication language used: "second ball," "tight," "step," "cover," plus general competitive encouragement.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Duel technique — timing, body position, technique in the air and on the ground.
Tactical	Choosing when to commit to a duel and when to delay for support.
Physical	High-intensity, repeated competitive contests.
Psychological	Competitive appetite and resilience — losing a duel and recovering the mentality quickly.
Communication & leadership	Team-mates encouraging and covering for each other after a lost duel.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What made the difference between the duels we won and the ones we lost?
2. Is committing to every duel always the right choice — when should we delay instead?
3. How do we recover, as a team, after losing a duel?

Progressions:

1. Increase the point value for aerial duels specifically.
2. Reduce the practice area, increasing contest frequency.
3. Add a genuine goal at each end to connect duel-winning to real outcomes.

Regressions:

1. Reduce to 4v4 for more individual repetitions.
2. Widen the area for more recovery time between contests.
3. Reduce the point value to lower the pressure while technique is still developing.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Duels become reckless or unfairly physical	Competitive intensity overriding control	Late or unfair challenges	Stop	Immediate, calm correction on fair and legal duelling	Resume
Players avoid duels altogether, playing too passively	Discomfort with physical contact	Repeated backing away from winnable contests	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Encouragement and specific technical tips	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: close, active refereeing of duel fairness combined with *encouragement*.

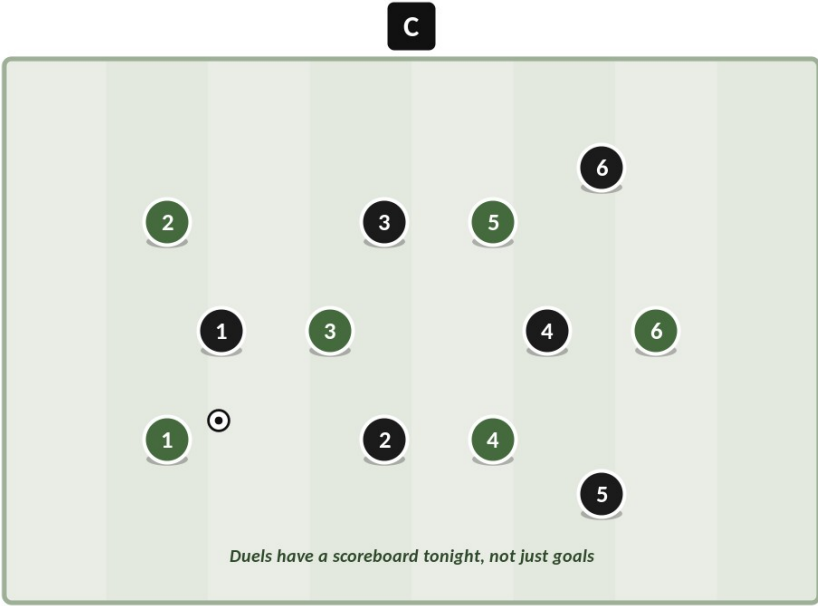
Success indicators:

- Duels are contested fairly, fully, and with good technique.
- The team's overall duel-win rate improves visibly across the practice.
- Players recover their shape and mentality quickly after a lost duel.

Coach's eye: this practice lives or dies on fair, consistent duel judging — if the group senses inconsistency, competitive intensity can tip into frustration rather than useful physical development.

T31.3 DUELS DECIDE IT — Small-Sided Game

30 x 20 m · 6v6 · every 1v1 and aerial duel won is worth a point, on top of goals · 15 minutes



● Team A ● Team B ● Ball

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AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram): "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style. A 30x20 metre area with dimension labels. Six players in dark green bibs numbered 1-6 and six players in black bibs numbered 1-6 spread across the area. White football near a green player. Title: 'DUELS DECIDE IT — Small-Sided Game'. Subtitle: '30 x 20 m · 6v6 · every 1v1 and aerial duel won is worth a point, on top of goals · 15 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

Realistic illustration — description: Elevated sideline view of a competitive small-sided game, a green-bibbed player winning a firm, fair physical duel against a black-bibbed opponent, both teams showing visible competitive intensity, coach on the touchline closely refereeing.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of an adult amateur small-sided football game on a grass pitch. A player in a dark green bib winning a firm, fair physical duel against a player in a black bib for the ball, both showing visible competitive effort. A coach on the touchline, closely observing and refereeing. Overcast evening light, realistic grass texture, amateur adult players of varied build. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

PRACTICE 4 — FACE THE LONG BALL (CONDITIONED MATCH)

Duration: 16 minutes · **Training load:** High

Tactical purpose: Confirms the week's principle at full match scale, with one team specifically instructed to play direct and physical throughout, testing whether the defending team's compactness and duel-winning hold up under sustained, realistic match pressure.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 50 x 36 m (half pitch)
- **Players:** 16 outfield + 2 goalkeepers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers play their own-goal role; the defending team's goalkeeper is coached specifically on dealing with long balls and organising the block
- **Team sizes:** 8 v 8
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 2 full-size or portable goals, 8 flat markers, corner cones
- **Starting positions:** standard match shape
- **Ball supply:** 3 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart location:** match-realistic restarts
- **Coach position:** touchline, halfway line, mobile
- **Rotation method:** teams swap the direct-playing role at the midpoint
- **Direction of play:** standard, both teams attack opposite goals

Practice walkthrough: One team is instructed to play direct and physical throughout — long balls, contested duels, quick physical pressure — while the other team applies everything rehearsed in Practices 2 and 3: staying compact, winning duels and second balls, and using the regain to launch its own attack.

Rules: Standard conditioned-match rules.

Tactical roles: the full compactness-and-duel identity from Practices 2–3, applied for the first time against a genuinely live, direct-playing opponent.

Decision-making triggers: the full set built across the session, applied under match-realistic pressure and consequence.

Communication language used: "second ball," "tight," "step," "cover."

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Duel and heading technique under full match pressure.
Tactical	Compactness maintained and second balls won consistently across a full conditioned match.
Physical	Sustained high-intensity, duel-heavy match effort.
Psychological	Competitive resilience across a longer period than the earlier practices.
Communication & leadership	The block organising itself vocally, without needing constant coach input.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Did our compactness hold up as well in minute fifteen as it did in minute one?
2. What's the very first thing we should notice that tells us we're facing a direct, physical opponent?
3. How does winning the second ball here connect to what we'll rehearse on Thursday about using a regain quickly?

Progressions:

1. Extend the direct-playing team's instructions to include more aggressive physical pressing after losing the ball.

- 2. Add a genuine scoreline pressure (e.g. the direct-playing team is "ahead" and playing to protect it).
- 3. Reduce numbers to 7v7 for a sharper individual duel demand.

Regressions:

- 1. Reduce the direct-playing team's long-ball frequency temporarily if the defending team is being overwhelmed.
- 2. Increase the practice area for more recovery time.
- 3. Pause briefly to reset the defending block's shape if it has broken down completely.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The defending team's compactness breaks down as fatigue sets in	Physical and mental discipline fading under sustained pressure	Growing gaps between defensive lines as the practice progresses	Stop	Short group intervention resetting the block's distances	Resume
The team wins the ball but immediately gives it back cheaply	No plan for what to do with a hard-won regain	Rushed, poor-quality passing immediately after a second-ball win	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "we worked hard to win that — what do we owe it?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: a mix of *short group intervention* and *questioning*, reserving deeper correction for the reflection immediately after.

Success indicators:

- The defending team's compact shape holds up for the duration of the practice.
- The defending team wins a clear majority of duels and second balls.
- Regains are used productively rather than given away immediately.

Coach's eye: this practice is the week's clearest test of Tuesday's teaching — judge it specifically against whether the team's shape at minute fifteen still looks like the shape it started with.

T31.4 FACE THE LONG BALL — Conditioned Match

50 x 36 m (half pitch) • 8v8 + GKs • one side plays direct and physical throughout — the other defends the whole picture • 17 minutes

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Long, direct, physical — the plan has to survive the picture it's built for

● Defending team

● Direct-playing opponent

● Goalkeeper

⦿ Ball

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AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram): "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style, showing half of a football pitch, 50x36 metres, with penalty box markings at both ends and a

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Alan Cunningham with Claude AI • independent club resource, following a principle-led, formation-neutral approach — not an official UEFA or Irish FA publication, not endorsed by either.

full-size goal at each end with a goalkeeper in yellow at each. Eight players in dark green bibs numbered 1–8 and eight players in black bibs numbered 1–8 spread across the pitch. White football near a black player. Title: 'FACE THE LONG BALL — Conditioned Match'. Subtitle: '50 x 36 m (half pitch) · 8v8 + GKs · one side plays direct and physical throughout — the other defends the whole picture · 17 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

Realistic illustration — description: Wide elevated view of a full-scale 8v8 conditioned match, black-bibbed players playing long, direct balls forward, a compact, disciplined green-bibbed defensive block contesting duels and winning second balls, coach on the touchline near halfway tracking the whole picture.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Wide elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of an adult amateur 8v8 conditioned football match on a half-size grass pitch with full-size goals and goalkeepers in yellow at each end. Players in black bibs playing a long ball forward. A compact, disciplined group of players in dark green bibs contesting the resulting duel and second ball. A coach stands near the halfway line on the touchline, tracking the whole picture. Early evening light with long shadows, realistic grass pitch markings, amateur adult players of varied build showing physical effort. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

REFLECTION (1 MINUTE)

One question to the group: "What's the very first sign that tells us we're facing a direct, physical opponent — and how quickly did we spot it tonight?"

Thursday — Session 62

FIELD	DETAIL
Session number	62 of 72
Week	31
Season phase	6 — Performance Consolidation
Training day	Thursday
Session theme	Opposition-specific: possession-based opponent
Short summary	Prepares the team specifically for a patient, possession-based opponent — pressing with a clear trap, winning the ball, and progressing quickly through, around, or over before the opponent can reorganise its shape.
Tags	`opposition-specific` `progression` `pressing-traps`
Primary learning objective	The team presses a patient, possession-based opponent with a clear plan and progresses quickly and effectively once the ball is won.
Secondary learning objective	The team recognises a patient, possession-based picture quickly and adjusts its pressing and transition mentality accordingly.
Match connection	This week's named match-day connection: two clearly different tactical plans delivered.
Expected tactical outcome	A team that presses with real intent against patient opponents and converts regains into fast, effective progression rather than immediately giving the ball back.
Expected physical load	Duel intensity, moderate — sharp, coordinated pressing actions and quick transitions rather than sustained running volume.
Recommended intensity	6.5–7.5 / 10.
Equipment list	20 footballs · 20 flat markers · 12 cones (orange) · 2 sets of bibs (2 colours, 10 each) · 2 full-size or portable goals
Player numbers	Designed for 16 outfield + 2 goalkeepers; scales 10–22, see contingencies.
Goalkeeper requirements	Both goalkeepers train throughout; distribution speed immediately after a regain is coached explicitly.
Pitch dimensions	Largest area this week is 50 x 36 m (Practice 3).
Area layout	A moderate technical zone for Practice 2, widening for Practices 3 and 4.
Contingency — lower attendance (10–13)	Practice 2 reduces to 6v4; Practice 3 becomes 6v6.
Contingency — higher attendance (20+)	Practice 4 can extend to 9v9.
Contingency — restricted space	Practice 2 works in any area; Practices 3–4 need realistic width and should not be excessively compressed.

TIMELINE (60 MINUTES)

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
0:00–0:10	10 min	Arrival & warm-up — <i>Patience Then Pounce</i>	Light green

TIME	DURATION	PHASE	COLOUR CODE
0:10-0:25	15 min	Technical / unit practice — <i>Press the Patient Team</i>	Club green
0:25-0:27	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:27-0:42	15 min	Unit / tactical practice — <i>Win It, Go Fast</i>	Dark green
0:42-0:44	2 min	Water break / transition	—
0:44-1:00	16 min	Conditioned match — <i>Break the Patient Block</i>	Black
1:00-1:01	1 min	Reflection	—

PRACTICE 1 — PATIENCE THEN POUNCE (ARRIVAL)

Duration: 10 minutes · **Training load:** Low-moderate

Tactical purpose: Warms the group up while introducing the mindset shift needed for the evening — staying patient and organised until the right pressing moment arrives, then committing decisively.

Organisation: 20 x 16 m grid, small groups. No goalkeeper requirement — both keepers join fully.

Walkthrough: An unconditioned rondo in which the defending player or pair must wait for a clear, coach-defined trigger (a heavy touch, a pass into a corner of the grid) before pressing, rather than chasing the ball immediately.

Rules: Defenders may only press once the trigger has occurred.

Coaching points:

- *Tactical:* recognising the trigger rather than pressing on instinct alone.
- *Psychological:* patience and discipline before the moment to press arrives.

PRACTICE 2 — PRESS THE PATIENT TEAM (TECHNICAL PRACTICE)

Duration: 15 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Tactical purpose: Trains the team to press a patient, possession-based opponent with a clear, coordinated trap rather than chasing the ball individually, showing the opponent into a specific area before committing collectively.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 44 x 28 m
- **Players:** 8 pressing players vs 5 possession-based opponents
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers rotate through as part of the pressing group

- **Team sizes:** 8 v 5
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** flat markers for starting positions
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** 2 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart:** coach restarts on any stoppage
- **Coach position:** mobile, observing the pressing shape closely
- **Rotation method:** groups rotate every five minutes
- **Direction of play:** the pressing group works to show, trap, and regain

Practice walkthrough: Five patient possession players attempt to keep the ball against eight pressers who are coached specifically to show the ball into a pre-agreed area (for example, one side of the practice area) before committing to a coordinated press, rather than chasing individually.

Rules: Standard pressing-and-regaining rules, with the pressing team specifically coached toward the agreed trap rather than free pressing.

Tactical roles:

- *Individual:* the nearest presser shows the ball into the trap rather than attacking it directly.
- *Unit:* the rest of the pressing group reads the show and closes the trap together.
- *Team:* not applicable at this scale.
- *Transition:* the moment of the regain is the start of Practice 3's theme.

Decision-making triggers:

- Ball played into the agreed trap area → the whole unit presses together, decisively.
- Ball kept away from the trap → stay patient, continue showing, don't chase.

Communication language used: "show," "trap," "press," "now."

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Body shape while showing the ball, timing of the collective press.
Tactical	Coordinated trapping rather than individual chasing against a patient opponent.
Physical	Sharp, coordinated bursts of pressing intensity.
Psychological	Patience before the trigger, full commitment once it arrives.
Communication & leadership	Calling the trap clearly so the whole unit presses together.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What happens if one player presses early, before the trap is set?
2. How do we agree, as a group, where we want to show the ball into?
3. What's the difference between showing the ball and actually pressing it?
4. Why might chasing the ball individually against a patient opponent actually help them, rather than hurt them?

Progressions:

1. Add a sixth possession player, testing whether the trap still functions under greater numerical disadvantage.

1. Reduce the practice area, sharpening the trap's timing demands.
2. Add a genuine transition consequence for a clean regain.

Regressions:

1. Widen the practice area for more time to organise the trap.
2. Reduce the possession group to three players.
3. Allow the coach to call the trap out loud until the group can recognise it independently.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
Players press individually and early, breaking the trap	Instinct to chase the ball rather than trust the collective plan	One presser committing well before the rest of the unit is ready	Stop	Freeze the picture, show the correct coordinated trap	Resume
The pressing group is too passive, never actually closing the trap	Overcorrection toward patience, losing the moment to commit	The ball sits comfortably in the trap area with no pressure applied	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "the trap was set — why didn't we close it?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: heavy on *freeze-and-show* early, shifting to *questioning* as the trap becomes more familiar.

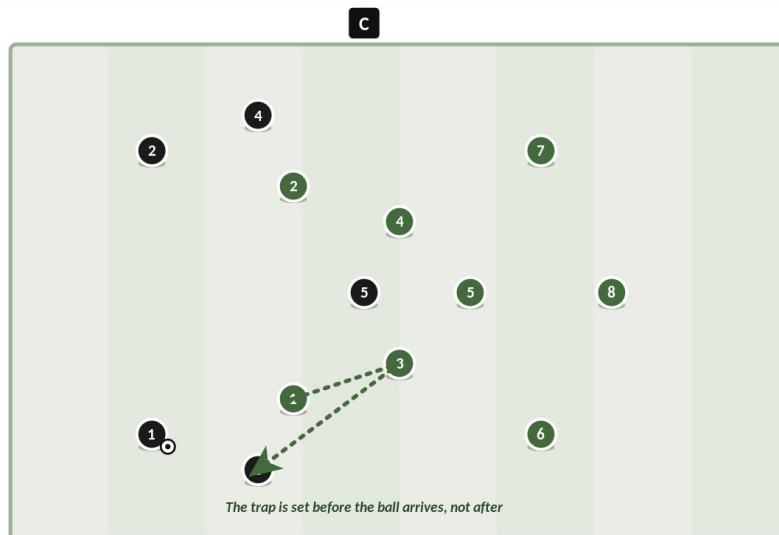
Success indicators:

- The pressing unit shows the ball into the agreed area consistently.
- The press is applied collectively, at the right moment, rather than individually and early.
- Regains increase in frequency as the practice progresses.

Coach's eye: watch the moment just before the press is triggered — a team that waits for the right moment and commits fully together has understood the lesson; a team that presses on instinct has not yet.

H31.2 PRESS THE PATIENT TEAM — Technical Practice

44 x 28 m • 8v5 • showing the picture, setting a pressing trap against a team that keeps the ball patiently • 15 minutes



● Pressing team ● Possession-based opponent ○ Ball ➤ Pressing trap

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AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram): "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style. A 44x28 metre area with dimension labels. Five players in black bibs numbered 1–5 spread across the area keeping possession, and eight players in dark green bibs numbered 1–8 organised in a pressing shape. White football near a black player. A shaded triangular zone showing a pressing trap, with curved arrows showing three green players closing in together. Title: 'PRESS THE PATIENT TEAM — Technical Practice'. Subtitle: '44 x 28 m • 8v5 • showing the picture, setting a pressing trap against a team that keeps the ball patiently • 15 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

Realistic illustration — description: Elevated wide view of a training area, green-bibbed players patiently showing the ball into a corner of the practice area before three of them close together decisively on a black-bibbed possession player, coach mobile and closely observing the timing of the press.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated wide three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of adult amateur football training. Players in dark green bibs patiently showing an opponent's pass into a corner of the practice area, then several closing in together decisively to press a player in a black bib holding the ball. A coach moving around the pitch, closely observing the timing of the press. Overcast evening light, realistic grass texture, amateur adult players of varied build. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

PRACTICE 3 — WIN IT, GO FAST (UNIT / TACTICAL PRACTICE)

Duration: 15 minutes • **Training load:** Moderate-high

Tactical purpose: Extends the pressing trap from Practice 2 into a full unit practice, specifically coaching what happens in the three seconds immediately after a regain against a patient opponent — progressing quickly through, around, or over before the opponent's shape can reset.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 50 x 34 m
- **Players:** 8 pressing/transitioning outfield + goalkeeper vs 8 possession-based opponents
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** the pressing team's goalkeeper is ready to support a fast build immediately after a regain

- **Team sizes:** 8 + GK v 8
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** flat markers for starting positions
- **Starting positions:** as shown in the diagram
- **Ball supply:** 3 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart:** nearest player restarts any stoppage
- **Coach position:** mobile, able to see the whole picture
- **Rotation method:** roles swap at the midpoint
- **Direction of play:** the possession-based team keeps the ball patiently; the pressing team works to regain and progress fast

Practice walkthrough: Eight possession-based opponents keep the ball patiently against eight pressers plus a goalkeeper. The moment the pressing team wins the ball, the coaching focus shifts entirely to speed and quality of the next three actions — a fast pass through a gap, a quick run around the opponent's shape, or a direct ball over the top — before the possession team can reorganise defensively.

Rules: A regain followed by a clean progression past the opponent's original defensive line within three passes scores a bonus point.

Tactical roles: the pressing-and-trapping identity from Practice 2, now combined with an immediate, decisive progression choice the moment the ball is won.

Decision-making triggers:

- Regain won with the opponent unorganised → go fast, directly, immediately.
- Regain won but the opponent is already reset → play more patiently, don't force it.

Communication language used: "show," "trap," "press," "now," plus the season's full progression language — through, around, over.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Speed and quality of the first pass or run immediately after a regain.
Tactical	Correctly judging whether the opponent is genuinely unorganised or already reset.
Physical	Explosive, sharp actions in the moments immediately after a regain.
Psychological	Urgency and decisiveness in the transition moment.
Communication & leadership	Immediate calls for a fast run or pass the instant the ball is won.

Guided discovery questions:

1. What does the opponent's shape look like in the first second after we win the ball — and how does that change what we should do?
2. Why is speed of decision more important than speed of movement in this moment?
3. How does this connect to what we practised on Tuesday about using a hard-won second ball productively?
4. What happens if we take too long deciding what to do after a regain?

Progressions:

1. Reduce the time allowed before the progression bonus expires.
2. Add a second possession-based opponent team, alternating who defends.
3. Reduce numbers to 7v7 for sharper decision-making demands.

Regressions:

1. Extend the time allowed for the progression bonus.
2. Reduce the possession-based team's numbers temporarily, simplifying the picture.
3. Allow a coach call ("go!") to prompt the fast progression until the group reads it independently.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The team wins the ball but plays too slowly afterward	Relief at winning the ball overrides urgency to use it	A slow, safe pass immediately after a clean regain, allowing the opponent to reset	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "what was available in that first second that isn't available now?"	Resume
The team forces a fast progression even when the opponent is already reorganised	Overcorrection toward speed regardless of the picture	A rushed, low-quality pass into a well-organised defensive shape	Stop	Short group intervention: "read the picture before deciding"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: a mix of *questioning* and *short group intervention*.

Success indicators:

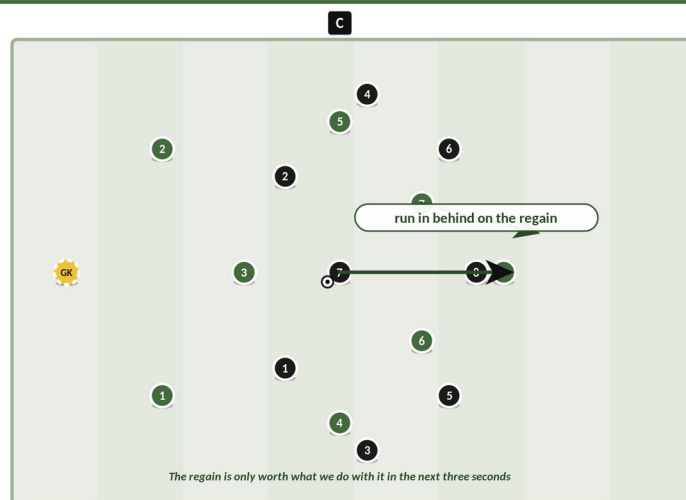
- The pressing team regularly progresses cleanly within three passes of a regain.
- Players read correctly whether the opponent is unorganised or already reset.
- The moment immediately after a regain looks visibly faster and more decisive than

earlier in the season.

Coach's eye: this practice is where Tuesday's second-ball work and Thursday's pressing work meet — judge it specifically against how the team behaves in the very first second after winning the ball.

H31.3 WIN IT, GO FAST — Unit Practice

50 x 34 m • 8v8 + GK • a clean regain against a patient opponent must progress through, around, or over before their shape resets • 15 minutes



● Team in transition ● Possession-based opponent ● Goalkeeper ○ Ball ➔ Fast progression after regain

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AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram): "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style. A 50x34 metre area with dimension labels. A goalkeeper in yellow on the left. Eight players in dark green bibs numbered 1–8 and eight players in black bibs numbered 1–8 spread across the pitch. White football near a green player. A bold black arrow showing a fast pass forward immediately after a regain, and a curved dashed line showing a run in behind. Title: 'WIN IT, GO FAST — Unit Practice'. Subtitle: '50 x 34 m • 8v8 + GK • a clean regain against a patient opponent must progress through, around, or over before their shape resets • 15 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

Realistic illustration — description: Elevated wide view of a unit practice, a green-bibbed player winning the ball cleanly and immediately releasing a fast pass forward, a team-mate sprinting into space in behind before the black-bibbed opponents can reorganise, coach observing from a central, elevated vantage point.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Elevated wide three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of an adult amateur football unit practice on a grass pitch. A player in a dark green bib winning the ball cleanly and immediately playing a fast forward pass. A team-mate in a matching bib sprinting into space in behind a group of players in black bibs who are still reorganising. A coach observing from a central vantage point. Overcast evening light, realistic grass texture, amateur adult players of varied build showing visible urgency. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

PRACTICE 4 — BREAK THE PATIENT BLOCK (CONDITIONED MATCH)

Duration: 16 minutes · **Training load:** Moderate-high

Tactical purpose: Confirms the week's principle at full match scale, with one team specifically instructed to play patient possession throughout, testing whether the pressing team's trap-and-transition identity holds up under sustained, realistic match pressure.

Organisation:

- **Pitch dimensions:** 50 x 36 m (half pitch)
- **Players:** 16 outfield + 2 goalkeepers
- **Goalkeeper involvement:** both keepers play their own-goal role; the pressing team's goalkeeper is coached specifically on supporting a fast build after a regain
- **Team sizes:** 8 v 8
- **Neutrals:** none
- **Equipment:** 2 full-size or portable goals, 8 flat markers, corner cones
- **Starting positions:** standard match shape
- **Ball supply:** 3 spare balls with the coach
- **Restart location:** match-realistic restarts
- **Coach position:** touchline, halfway line, mobile
- **Rotation method:** teams swap the patient-possession role at the midpoint
- **Direction of play:** standard, both teams attack opposite goals

Practice walkthrough: One team is instructed to play patient possession throughout — probing, unhurried, keeping the ball for its own sake — while the other team applies everything rehearsed in Practices 2 and 3: pressing with a clear trap, regaining the ball, and progressing quickly before the possession side can reorganise.

Rules: Standard conditioned-match rules.

Tactical roles: the full pressing-trap-and-transition identity from Practices 2–3, applied for the first time against a genuinely live, patient opponent.

Decision-making triggers: the full set built across the session, applied under match-realistic pressure and consequence.

Communication language used: "show," "trap," "press," "now," plus the season's full progression language.

Coaching points:

CORNER	POINT
Technical	Pressing technique and first-touch quality on the transition.
Tactical	Coordinated trapping and fast progression maintained across a full conditioned match.
Physical	Sustained moderate-high intensity, sharp bursts around the pressing moments.
Psychological	Patience under prolonged possession from the opponent, followed by decisive urgency.
Communication & leadership	The pressing unit organising its trap vocally, without needing constant coach input.

Guided discovery questions:

1. Did our patience hold up across the whole practice, or did we start pressing early out of frustration as it went on?
2. What's the very first thing we should notice that tells us we're facing a patient, possession-based opponent?
3. How does this connect to Tuesday's session — what's genuinely different about how we defend these two types of opponent, and what stays the same?

Progressions:

- ## Regressions:

1. Reduce the possession-based team's patience temporarily if the pressing team is becoming frustrated or undisciplined.

1. Increase the practice area for more organisational time.
2. Pause briefly to reset the pressing trap if it has broken down completely.

Common problems and corrections:

PROBLEM	WHY IT HAPPENS	COACH RECOGNISES BY	STOP OR FLOW?	INTERVENTION	RESTART
The pressing team loses patience and presses individually and early	Frustration building against a team that won't be rushed	Increasingly chaotic, uncoordinated pressing as the practice progresses	Stop	Short group intervention resetting the trap and the patience required	Resume
Regains are won but immediately given away through slow or poor decisions	The transition-speed lesson from Practice 3 hasn't transferred to full match conditions	A slow, safe response immediately after a clean regain, allowing the opponent to reset	Let it flow, then a natural stoppage	Question: "what did we lose by taking that extra second?"	Resume

Coach interventions used in this practice: a mix of *short group intervention* and *questioning*, reserving deeper correction for the reflection immediately after.

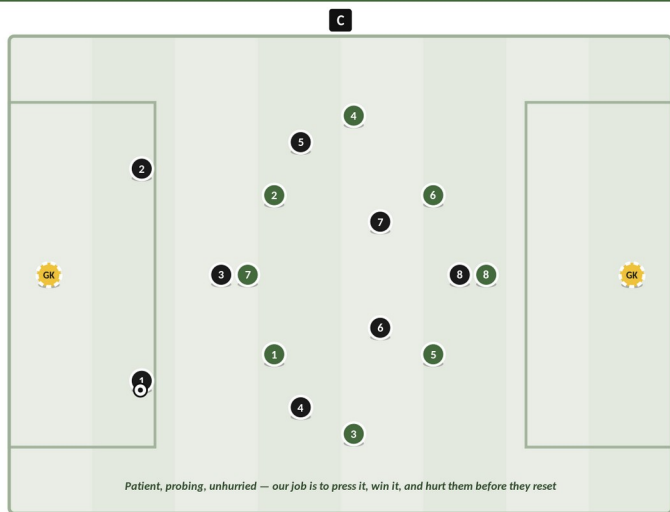
Success indicators:

- The pressing team maintains its trap discipline for the duration of the practice.
- Regains are converted into fast, clean progression more often than not.
- The team's patience under sustained opposition possession is visibly better than earlier in the season.

Coach's eye: this practice is the week's clearest test of Thursday's teaching — judge it specifically against whether the pressing trap still looks organised, rather than desperate, by the fifteenth minute.

H31.4 BREAK THE PATIENT BLOCK — Conditioned Match

50 x 36 m (half pitch) • 8v8 + GKs • one side plays patient possession throughout — the other presses, regains, and progresses fast • 17 minutes



- Pressing / transitioning team ● Possession-based opponent ● Goalkeeper ⊙ Ball

AI image-generation prompt (tactical diagram): "Top-down 2D vector football coaching diagram, clean white background, UEFA coaching-manual style, showing half of a football pitch, 50x36 metres, with penalty box markings at both ends and a full-size goal at each end with a goalkeeper in yellow at each. Eight players in black bibs numbered 1–8 and eight players in dark green bibs numbered 1–8 spread across the pitch. White football near a black player. Title: 'BREAK THE PATIENT BLOCK — Conditioned Match'. Subtitle: '50 x 36 m (half pitch) • 8v8 + GKs • one side plays patient possession throughout — the other presses, regains, and progresses fast • 17 minutes'. Legend row at bottom. High-resolution landscape vector illustration, clear typography, no decorative elements, no club badges or logos."

Realistic illustration — description: Wide elevated view of a full-scale 8v8 conditioned match, black-bibbed players circulating the ball patiently, a green-bibbed pressing unit closing a coordinated trap around them, coach on the touchline near halfway tracking the whole picture.

AI image-generation prompt (realistic illustration): "Wide elevated three-quarter sideline photograph-style illustration of an adult amateur 8v8 conditioned football match on a half-size grass pitch with full-size goals and goalkeepers in yellow at each end. Players in black bibs circulating the ball patiently. A coordinated group of players in dark green bibs closing in together to press and trap the ball. A coach stands near the halfway line on the touchline, tracking the whole picture. Early evening light with long shadows, realistic grass pitch markings, amateur adult players of varied build. Professional sports-photography style, high resolution, landscape orientation, no club badges, sponsor logos, or identifiable real players."

REFLECTION (1 MINUTE)

One question to the group: "What's the very first sign that tells us we're facing a patient, possession-based opponent — and how quickly did we spot it tonight?"

Match-Day Objectives

Three team objectives:

1. Read which of the two pictures Saturday's opponent presents — direct and physical, or patient and possession-based — as early as possible in the match.
1. Execute the correct plan decisively once the picture is confirmed: compactness and duel-winning against a direct opponent, or coordinated pressing and fast transition against a patient one.
1. Stay ready to adjust mid-match if the opponent's approach genuinely changes.

Three unit objectives:

1. **Back line and goalkeeper:** organise the block's distances against a direct opponent, or trigger and support the press against a patient one.
1. **Midfield unit:** win the individual and second-ball duels against a direct opponent, or execute the fast progression choice against a patient one.
1. **Front players:** contest aerial duels and hold the first line of the press against a direct opponent, or provide the first fast run or pass option against a patient one.

Individual role reminders:

- Know both plans — this week deliberately taught two, not one.
- Read the picture early and communicate it to team-mates.
- Trust the plan that matches what's actually happening, not the one you expected before kick-off.

Measurable performance indicators:

- Duel and second-ball win rate against a direct, physical opponent.
- Number of clean regains progressed within three passes against a patient, possession-based opponent.
- Speed and accuracy of picture-recognition — how early the correct plan is applied.

Formation Translation — Applying This Across Different Structures

Opposition-specific: direct/physical and possession-based opponents

STRUCTURE	HOW COMPACTNESS TYPICALLY EXPRESSES ITSELF (VS. DIRECT/PHYSICAL)	HOW FAST PROGRESSION TYPICALLY EXPRESSES ITSELF (VS. POSSESSION-BASED)	WHAT STAYS THE SAME	KEY RISK
4-3-3	Through the back four's vertical distances and the double pivot's second-ball responsibility	Through the front three's immediate runs and the double pivot's first pass after a regain	The underlying picture-recognition and principle-application process	Reading the wrong picture, or reading it correctly but too slowly to matter
3-4-3	Through the back three's cover and the wing-backs' duel responsibility	Through the front three and attacking midfielders' fast combination after a regain	The same underlying process	The same risk — a settled structure doesn't replace the need to read the picture accurately

Coach Review

To be completed by the coaching staff after delivery.

What worked well this week:

What needs more work:

Attendance and availability notes:

Adjustments for next week:

Individual player notes:

Written by Alan Cunningham with Claude AI · Castlewellan Town FC — Senior Coaching Curriculum · session design follows the four-corner model used in UEFA coach education (technical, tactical, physical, psychological) and the principle-led, formation-neutral approach set out in modern coach education. An independent club resource, not an official UEFA or Irish FA publication and not endorsed by either.